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ABSTRACT

The majority of employment and training programs are designed as one-size-fits-all, leaving approximately 85 percent of participants unsatisfied, unmotivated, or forced back into a job with no chance of advancement. In targeting a clientele of single parents and dislocated workers, an action research project, called Chance to Advance, conducted in Pennsylvania, provided an opportunity for participants to select instruction according to their individual needs. At the start of the program, participants were tested to determine academic skill levels and intervention needs. The 10 program participants were empowered by the use of supportive techniques customized to fit their aspirations so that they could evaluate their current skill levels and the needs of the labor market and current career fields. Less time was spent on instruction, with increased time spent on helping participants locate employment in line with their skills, knowledge, and goals. Data collected through testing, surveys, and interviews showed that participants enrolled in Chance to Advance had been unaware of their reading and mathematics skills problems and of how important these skills are to job success. Halfway through the 12-week program, participants submitted suggestions, such as having more class time, and others said that the instruction provided has been essential to a successful job hunt. Further research on the individualized format with a larger group was suggested. (KC)

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PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Special Project

A Learning From Practice Project

Action Research Monograph

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PRODUCT

"Pennsylvania Action Research Network:
Staff Development Through
Six Professional Development Centers"

Project Number 099-99-9010
July 1998-June 1999

Project Director
Dr. Gary Kuhne
Assistant Professor and Regional Director of Adult Education
The Pennsylvania State University

Note: Action Research is a process of systematic inquiry credited to Kurt Lewin who popularized it in the U.S. in the 1940"s. Today it is considered a system of qualitative research. Typical of action research, none of the individual projects in this monograph series claims to have generalizable application beyond the specific project described. However, each monograph report can serve to be illustrative, instructive and provides the potential for replication in other locations. For a level of generalizability, it is recommended that the reader seek common patterns in the monograph reports in this series, and the wider literature, or contact the Action Research Network for assistance in this.

I. ABSTRACT

At present the majority of employment and training programs have consistently been designed as one-size-fits-all, leaving approximately 85% of all participants unsatisfied, unmotivated, or forced back into a job with no chance of advancement. In targeting a clientele representative of single parents and dislocated workers, my Action Research Project proposes providing an opportunity for participants to select instruction according to their own individual needs, thereby facilitating an atmosphere conducive to a more productive outcome. The goal being of the project is to promote independence. By empowering participants with supportive techniques customized to fit their individual aspirations, they can evaluate personal and current skill levels and that of the of market and career fields of today.

II. PROBLEM

It is the consensus of the powers that be, i.e. the government, that if all low to moderately low-income families currently receiving public assistance are registered in a one size fits all employment and training program that would not only ease the transition from welfare to work, but it would also make employment more accessible. My Action Research Project will attempt to challenge the notion represented by one-size-fits-all programs, by focusing on individualized instruction that provides choices for each individual according to need. To date, many who are enrolled in a one-size-fits-all program have little hope finding a job that best fits their current skill level. Due to lack of support, guidance and adequate account of individualized skill levels, participants either exit the program without finding employment or they take open positions that warrant 20 hours of work without learning anything, due to the goal being only to find a job, any job. My current title as Workplace Coordinator places me in a position to instruct participants from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds three times a week for a total of six hours. I have both men and women whose backgrounds are reflective of single parent families, low-income families and displaced workers. One of my responsibilities is to target individualized needs, i.e. low self-esteem, goal setting and other life skills and to make referral accordingly. This provides participants with more self awareness and the the facilitator with more insight into targeting individualized needs of participants, with an emphasis being placed on keeping them focused, challenged, comfortable and goal oriented.

III. PLANNING

Intervention

My Action Research Project will begin in Mid-February 1999 with each session concluding at the end of 12 weeks. Due to the availability of individual choice instruction, completion will differ from one participant to the next. Presently this job skills program, Chance to Advance, is available at two different locations, with hopes of expanding to two additional sites in the near future along with in-kind childcare services being offered by the YMCA and the Literacy Project, during the summer months. The program will supply all necessary supplies, i.e. -- pencils, pens, paper and folders. In addition to job skills, related information, along with an introduction into self-esteem, decision making, goal setting, career & guidance and computer skills will be available. The implementation of various guest speakers will be announced on an as needed basis, during the 12 week session. The importance of regular attendance and participation will also be stressed and expected. Reasons for regular attendance are two fold: (1) participants will be held accountable for retrieving information according to schedule. (2) regular class attendance is stressed to all participants because it will demonstrate individual character, accountability and reliability.

Data Collecting Strategies

Through the use of field notes, journals and a portfolio the goal will be to make job seekers aware, of the benefits and success levels that can be obtained through the use of a program that targets specific individual needs. Thus, less time is spent on instruction, while increasing time spent looking for and locating employment reflective of their skills, knowledge and goals. Chance to Advance promises to equip each participant with the knowledge necessary to obtain a job/career that best fits the participants long and short term goals.

Baseline

All participants will be asked to take part in an evaluation/survey that will help in determining the need for Chance to Advance and its approach to choice instruction vs. the one-size fits all programs that instruct all participants on one level regardless of their readiness level. The evaluation/survey also serves as a catalyst that benefits all with respect to the programs origins, path and direction.

Criteria for Success

When comparing the format of the one-size fits all programs vs. Chance to Advance pick-and-choose format, participants currently enrolled in Chance to Advance favored 100% the pick and choose format over the one size fits all format. When asked why, 70% found the pick-and-choose format to be more flexible, class size more desirable and instruction more reflective of their individual needs. The other 30% suggested that, although Chance to Advance smaller class size allowed them to be more attentive to instruction, both groups were excellent when comparing class instruction. But that same 30% favored the one size fits all programs over Chance to Advance when incentives such as child care and funding for transportation to and from class were made available. When comparing the success rate of the knowledge obtained and sustained of Chance to Advance participants vs. the one-size fits all, on a much larger scale, 75% of all clients (one-size-fits-all) interviewed were challenged when asked about basic resume outlines, due to all their resumes being mass produced with participants having no hands on experience with its application. In comparison to the 50% enrolled in Chance to Advance resume writing were not only instructed on basic resume outlines but were also given information pertaining to the different types of resumes, how create them and which outline best fit their current need in relationship to the job market of today. They are also asked to prepare and produce their own resume outlines, reinforcing their independence while enhancing their ability to tutor and share information with others.

IV. ACTION

Data Collecting Methods

In maintaining a well rounded program as well as a well rounded individual, testing was provided to all willing participants of Chance to Advance with no refusals. This process was instituted in order to assess the current academic skill levels of all participants in relationship to reading/comprehension, math, and spelling capabilities. Once individual levels were established, and more intervention applied if needed, i.e. G.E.D. instruction, or Basic Tutoring, all participants were referred to the necessary entities accordingly.

Data Collected

Data collected through the use of testing, questionnaire/ survey and interviews showed that all participants enrolled in Chance to Advance were unaware of their problems associated with comprehension, reading and math or of how important it is to sustain an accurate knowledge of skill levels when it comes to finding and competing for the jobs or careers of their choice.

V. RESULTS

Midway through Chance to Advance, participants were asked to submit (at their leisure) suggestions in the suggestion box or any opinions, ideas or comments that could be used to better equip the program in continuing to provide an atmosphere that meets the needs of all its participants. Out of the 10 currently enrolled, 7 individuals submitted responses as follows; "Chance to Advance has hit the mark by providing adequate instruction and information that is essential to a successful Job hunt." Three out of ten suggested, "implementing more time for class instruction." meaning, instead of the two hours that it currently provides per session, institute 3 to 4 more hours for those individuals willing to commit. At the conclusion of the 12 week program, follow-ups will be conducted to assess the success rate of participants and to remain in contact with those still in need of further instruction and guidance. Note that presently 2 out of 10 participants currently enrolled are employed and working on part-time basis, doing what they are skilled at and love to do.

VI. REFLECTION

My Action Research Project clearly reflects all that I anticipated positively speaking. For instance: Chance to Advance out performed the one-size-fits-all programs with results reflective of a program that brings about stimulation, motivation, awareness and the guidance required in order to obtain a job/career that best fits personal skill and academic levels. The data collected shows that the current one size fits all programs lack the fundamentals associated with long term successful outlooks. Statistics produced on a small scale (participants of Chance to Advance) suggested that 7 out of 10 participants had negative experiences with the one-size-fits all format, were they were not viewed as an individual but as part of a group that did not represent the individual reasons for being enrolled. Although data collected were favorable to the pick-and-choose format,

unfortunately I have concluded that with the time frame previously outlined, is insufficient and more time must be allotted in order to achieve the most accurate results possible. This has been suggested because Chance to Advance the pick-and choose format, is a really new program that has only been successful with an enrollment of 10 participants.

Leaving room for some to speculation on its success rate, if participation was so low when compared to that of the one-size-fits-all programs whose enrollment has far outweighed that of Chance to Advance, on a scale of 1 to 10 the one-size-fits-all format rates a ten with Chance to Advance coming in on number one.

CONCLUSION

If I were to do things differently, first I would try to accumulate as many participants as possible. Second, I would plan testing to be done at the earliest possible convenience, so that there would be no need to solely count on personal observations, thereby providing an opportunity for referrals to be made as soon as possible. Third, I would prefer to work with another individual because, (a) Counseling/support and intervention would be in place at all times; (b) participants appear to be more attentive, focused and instruction more engaging when there were two individuals to concentrate on; and (c) with the availability of two individuals conducting class instruction, one person could be freed up to tend to other matters, allowing class instruction to flow on a more consistent level and in the end resulting in a more beneficial program format for all involved. Last but not least, I would try to institute funding for childcare services and travel expenses that would accumulate for the purposes of obtaining applications, going to and from interviews and class instruction in Chance to Advance.

Does Santa have you feeling like you barely have enough money for the holidays?

Is your Christmas list bigger than your paycheck?

DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!

Plan on making more money next year!

Join the Lycoming County Literacy Projects' *"Chance To Advance"* program. This program will enable you to build job search skills, as well as help you find a better job that suits your needs.

The best thing about the program is that is is FREE of cost. If you would like more information, Call 321-0200.

LYCOMING COUNTY LITERACY PROJECT

"PRESENTS"

CHANCE
ADVANCE

DIRECTED BY: ***MRS. LINDA HERR***
INSTRUCTED BY: *MS. VALORIE TAYLOR*

LYCOMING COUNTY LITERACY PROJECT

CHANCE TO ADVANCE

MISSION STATEMENT:

CHANCE TO ADVANCE - PROMISES TO BRING ABOUT AN ATOMSPHERE THAT WILL SUPPLY ALL WILLING PARTICIPANTS WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO EVALUATE PERSONAL AND CURRENT SKILL LEVELS WITH THAT OF THE JOB MAKET AND CAREER FIELDS OF TODAY.

BY EMPOWERING PARTICIPANTS WITH SUPPORTIVE TECHNIQUES IN A CUSTOMIZED TRAINING PROGRAM THAT WILL PROVIDE STRUCTURE, GUIDANCE AND A FOCUS TOWARDS SUCCESS.

LYCOMING COUNTY LITERACY PROJECT

CHANCE TO ADVANCE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. GET AQUAINTED/IDENTIFYING YOUR SKILLS
2. POSITIVE ATTITUDES
3. SELF ESTEEM
4. GOAL SETTING
5. JOB NEEDS
6. JOB APPLICATIONS
7. JOB SEARCH & NETWORKING
8. JOB OBJECTIVES
9. RESUME WRITING
10. PHONE SKILLS & EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS
11. PRESENTATION: LIBRARY RESOURCES
12. INTRODUCTION TO COMPUTERS
13. COVER LETTERS
14. THANK - YOU NOTES
15. DRESS TO IMPRESS
16. INTRODUCTION: JOB INTERVIEWS
17. MOCK INTERVIEWS (1)
18. MOCK INTERVIEWS (2)
19. CAREERS & GUIDANCE
20. OPEN DAYS (PARTICIPANTS)

CHANCE TO ADVANCE
ADMISSIONS SHEET

PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS THAT APPLY TO YOU. LEAVE BLANK ANY QUESTIONS THAT YOU PERFER NOT TO ANSWER. THESE RESPONSES WILL ALSO BE USED FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES. YOUR AUTHORIZATION WILL BE NEEDED IN ORDER FOR YOUR APPLICATION TO BE PROCESSED.

1. NAME_____

2. ADDRESS_____

   CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

3. TELEPHONE NUMBER_____

4. AGE_____

5. SEX - MALE ____ FEMALE _____

6. FAMILY SIZE _____

7. EMPLOYMENT STATUS - EMPLOYED _____ UNEMPLOYED _____

8. LAST DATE OF EMPLOYMENT? _____

9. NAME OF THE COMPANY WITH WHOM YOU WERE LAST EMPLOYED?

   _____

10. NAME OF COMPANY IN WHICH YOU ARE PRESENTLY EMPLOYED?

    _____

11. ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME RANGE: (check one)

    1000 - 5000 _____ 5000 - 10,000 _____10,000 - 15,000 _____

    15,000 - 20,000 _____20,000 - 25,000 & UP _____

12. ARE YOU PRESENTLY:

SINGLE ___ MARRIED____ SEPARATED ___ DIVORCED ____

CHANCE TO ADVANCE - CONT'

13. HOW MANY PEOPLE LIVING IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD ARE (18) YEARS OLD OR OLDER?_____

14. HOW MANY PEOPLE LIVING IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD ARE PRESENTLY 17 YEARS OLD OR YOUNGER ?_____

15. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ENROLLED IN AN EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAM? YES____ NO_____

IF YES, WHO WAS THE SPONSORING AGENCY?

_____

16. WERE YOU ABLE TO FIND A JOB WHILE YOU WERE ENROLLED WITH THIS PROGRAM ? YES _____ NO _____

17. DID YOU FIND THE PROGRAM VALUABLE, INFORMATIVE AND SUPPORTIVE OF YOUR NEEDS ? YES_____ NO _____

18. HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINIG PROGRAM/S?

EXCELLENT _____ GOOD _____ FAIR _____ POOR _____

19. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE INSTRUCTOR/S?

EXCELLENT _____ GOOD _____ FAIR _____ POOR _____

20. IF YOU COULD MAKE ANY CHANGES WITHIN THE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

_____

_____

_____

CHANCE TO ADVANCE - CONT'

21. WHICH WOULD YOU PREFER:
    A. AN EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAM THAT OFFERS A ONE SIZE FITS ALL PROGRAM WITH A TIME DURATION OF (5) TO (6) HOURS PER SESSION?

    OR

    B. AN EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAM THAT ALLOWED YOU TO MAKE CHOICES ON SUBJECT MATTER ACCORDING TO YOUR NEEDS ?

    CHECK ONE - A._____ B_____

22. IF YOU CHECKED QUESTION (A) WHY?

_____

_____

_____

23. IF YOU CHECKED QUESTION (B) WHY?

_____

_____

_____

24. HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT "*CHANCE TO ADVANCE*"?

_____

_____

_____

CHANCE TO ADVANCE - CONT'

25. WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE FROM THIS PROGRAM?

_____

_____

_____

26. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE INSTRUCTOR?

EXCELLENT _____ GOOD _____ FAIR _____ POOR _____

27. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE PROGRAMS OVER-ALL PERFORMANCE?

EXCELLENT ___ GOOD ___ FAIR ___ POOR____

28. DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS ON HOW THE PROGRAM COULD BE IMPROVED?

_____

_____

_____

29. WAS THE PROGRAM SUCCESSFUL IN HELPING YOU TO REACH YOUR GOAL?

YES _____ NO _____

30. WHAT DID YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT WHAT THE PROGRAM HAS TO OFFER?

_____

_____

_____

CHANCE TO ADVANCE - CONT'

31. HOW MANY CLASSES DO YOU PLAN ON PARTICIPATING IN?
_____ ?

32. WHAT WERE THE TITLES OF THE CLASSES?

_____ _____

_____ _____

33. WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THIS PROGRAM TO FAMILY, FRIENDS AND CO-WORKERS?

YES _____ NO _____

34. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE ATOMSPHERE OF THE PROGRAM (*CHANCE TO ADVANCE*) LOCATIONS?

_____

_____

35. WHAT CLASS SIZE WOULD YOU PREFER? (CHECK ONE)

SMALL _____ MED_____ LARGE _____

36. WERE YOU ABLE TO FIND A JOB WITH THE SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE OF *CHANCE TO ADVANCE*?

YES _____ OR NO_____

COMMENTS:

_____

_____

NAME (PLEASE PRINT): _____

SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

NAME OF PROGRAM INSTRUCTOR: _____